

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 427

HE 035 762

AUTHOR Atherton, Blair  
TITLE The Florida Student Student Services Centers: Factors Influencing Students' Decisions To Enroll in Nova Southeastern University's Programs.  
INSTITUTION Nova Southeastern Univ., Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Research and Planning.  
REPORT NO NSU-RP-01-12  
PUB DATE 2001-07-00  
NOTE 21p.  
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)  
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*College Students; \*Decision Making; \*Enrollment; \*Geographic Location; Higher Education; Student Surveys  
IDENTIFIERS \*Nova Southeastern University FL

## ABSTRACT

A brief survey was administered to 182 students in selected business master's program classes in April and May 2001 at the Florida Student Service Centers of Nova Southeastern University (NSU). The purpose was to gain insight into the factors that led to students' decisions to attend NSU rather than some other institution. The survey included questions about how and when students first heard about NSU's programs, specific factors that influenced their decision to enroll, and other institutions they had considered attending. Data are presented in the aggregate and by individual service center. As was consistent with past surveys, location was the number one decision factor for attending classes at NSU service centers in Florida. Reputation was also an important factor, as was convenient scheduling. The most frequently cited means by which students learned of NSU was word of mouth, rather than advertising media. About 60% of new students heard of NSU from others, but the media that were most frequently cited were newspapers (16%) and the NSU Web site (12%). Most new students, approximately 70%, had heard of NSU 1 or more years before initial enrollment. Results differ slightly for different service centers, but overall, survey results should be valuable for administrators and planners. An appendix contains the survey form. (Contains 2 figures and 19 tables.) (Author/SLD)

# Nova Southeastern University

ED 475 427

## **The Florida Student Service Centers: Factors Influencing Students' Decisions to Enroll in Nova Southeastern University's Programs**

Blair Atherton  
Executive Director of Institutional Research

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Research and Planning  
July 2001  
Report No. 01-12

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## **Executive Summary**

A short survey was administered to 182 students in selected business master's program classes in April and May 2001 at the Florida Student Service Centers. The purpose was to gain insight into the factors that led to students' decisions to attend NSU rather than some other institution. The survey included questions about how and when students first heard about NSU's programs, specific factors that influenced their decision to enroll, and what other institutions they considered attending. Data are presented in the aggregate and by individual service centers.

Consistent with more expansive surveys of students and alumni in the past, location was the number one decision factor for attending classes at NSU service centers in Florida. Reputation was also an important factor. Convenient scheduling was also cited by students.

The most frequently cited means by which students first learned of NSU was by word-of-mouth from other NSU students, friends, relatives, or employers, rather than from various advertising media. On the order of 60 percent of new students learned of NSU through word-of-mouth. The media most frequently cited by new students were newspapers (16 percent) and the NSU Web site (12 percent). Furthermore, the majority of new students (approximately 70 percent) first learned of NSU one or more years in advance of initial enrollment.

The results differ slightly for the various service centers. Therefore, the data may assist service center directors in fine tuning their recruitment efforts. Overall, the survey results should be valuable to service center directors and others for planning and assessing modes of informing students of NSU's course and program offerings, and for identifying local competitors.

## Introduction

In order to provide better services to students, five Student Service Centers were developed over the past year and a half in areas of Florida outside of Broward County where substantial numbers of student clusters were located. The aim was to provide central facilities housing an array of student services, classrooms, and computer labs for students in the area taking classes in any of the university's programs. Centralization of all class meetings in a single facility, rather than at multiple sites in the same geographic area, should also result in cost savings for the university. Furthermore, a central student service center might provide a greater sense of identity of students with the larger university and provide value-added benefits for distance education students.

In the winter term 2001, substantial increases in enrollments at the service centers were observed. This stimulated the present study to gather information concerning possible factors contributing to student choice of NSU over competing institutions in the area. While enrollments had increased in most programs served by the service centers, business programs had some of the largest increases. Therefore, these were chosen for study.

## Methods

The Executive Director of Off Campus Services participated in development of the survey instrument and asked the school of business to identify classes at the Florida service centers that should include a large proportion of entering students. He also made arrangements for administration of the survey by service center personnel.

Surveys were administered by service center directors to the following classes:

<b>Jacksonville</b>	Friday, April 27, 2001 (Sequence I)
<b>Miami</b>	Friday, April 20, 2001 (Kendall)
	Friday, April 20, 2001 (Lucent)
	Friday, April 20, 2001 (Royal Caribbean)
	Friday, April 27, 2001 (Pan Am)
<b>Tampa</b>	Friday, April 20, 2001 (Sequence II)
	Friday, April 27, 2001 (Sequence I)
<b>West Palm Beach</b>	Friday, April 27, 2001

The survey instrument appears in Appendix A. Survey packets were prepared for each class that included an envelope for return of the completed surveys directly to Research and Planning for processing.

## Results

### Distribution of Responses Among Florida Service Centers

Since the survey was administered to students in the classroom, the response rate was 100 percent for each class. A total of 182 surveys were returned from four of the five Florida service centers. Orlando was not included because the class selected by the school of business was small and composed exclusively of doctoral students near completion of their program. The distribution of surveys returned appears in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Number of Surveys from Each Service Center**

Service Center	No. of Surveys	Percent of Total
Jacksonville	13	7%
Miami	78	43%
Tampa	66	36%
W. Palm Beach	25	14%

Classes in Miami and Tampa together produced 79 percent of all surveys included in the analysis. Four classes in Miami and two classes in Tampa were surveyed. However, only one class was surveyed in Jacksonville and West Palm Beach. Therefore, when data are aggregated for all service centers, Miami and Tampa dominate the results.

### Student Characteristics

Demographic data, such as race, ethnicity, and gender were not collected, because of the broad nature of the questions asked in the study. All of the students surveyed were pursuing either a master of business administration or a master of international business degree.

When a student first enrolled at NSU was particularly relevant to the intent of the study because the responses of new students were of primary interest. For the purposes of this analysis, new students were defined as those who reported their first term of enrollment at NSU to be anytime during the 2000-2001 academic year. In some cases, the responses of new students were analyzed separately from those of all students combined. The distribution of students according to the first academic year in which they enrolled at NSU is shown in Table 2 below.



**Table 2**  
**First Year Enrolled at NSU**

<b>First Year Enrolled</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Academic year 2000-2001	68	37%
Academic year 1999- 2000	53	29%
Academic year 1998 or earlier	45	25%
Blank	16	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **When Students Heard about NSU and the Programs Offered**

As shown in Table 3, when students first heard about or became aware of NSU was not always immediately preceding a new student's first enrollment. However, it may have coincided with marketing campaigns conducted by the service center, or by a particular academic center.

**Table 3**  
**First Heard about NSU**

<b>First Year Heard About NSU</b>	<b>All Respondents</b>		<b>New Students</b>	
	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Academic year 2000-2001	23	13%	14	22%
Academic year 1999-2000	55	30%	22	35%
Academic year 1998 or earlier	88	48%	21	33%
Blank	16	9%	6	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100%</b>

Approximately one-half of all respondents first heard about NSU during academic year 1998 or earlier, while only 25 percent reported their first attendance in academic year 1998 or earlier. Almost 80 percent of all respondents heard about NSU in academic year 1999-2000 or earlier.

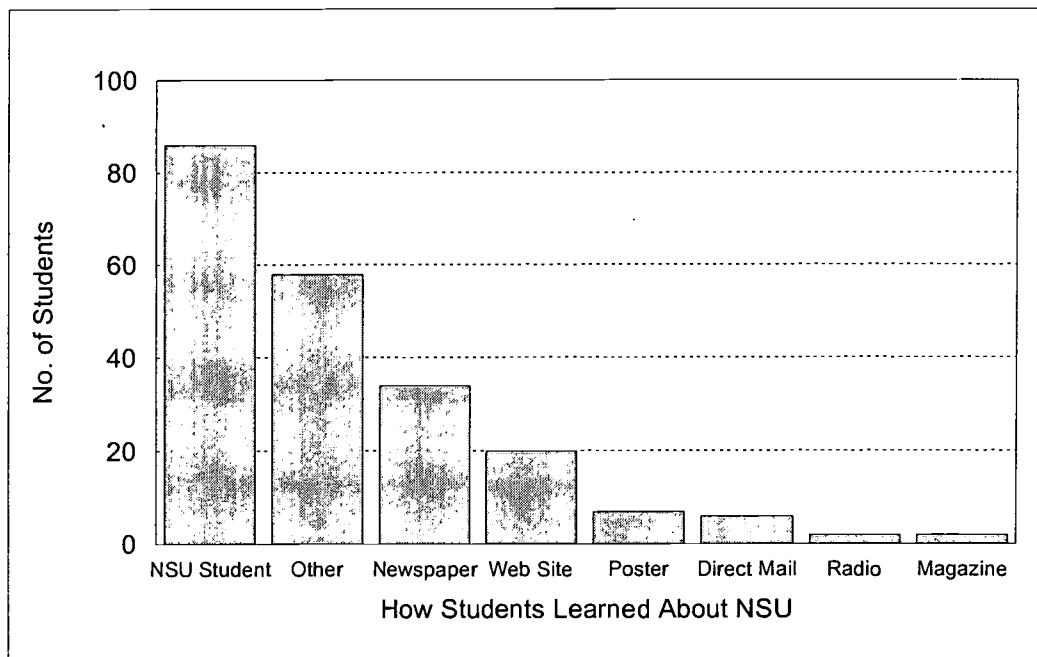
New students represented approximately one-third of all respondents. Twenty-two percent of the new students first heard about NSU just prior to enrollment. The remainder first heard about NSU one or more years in advance of enrollment.

### **How Students Heard about NSU and the Programs Offered**

Information about the media or means by which students learned of NSU's course and program offerings should be helpful in assessing the most effective or productive types of advertising. This may provide better focus for advertising campaigns and could potentially result in more efficient use of resources.

Students were given a list of media used for advertising from which they could choose one or more that informed them of NSU course or program offerings. The results in Table 4 are presented as a frequency distribution in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Frequency Distribution of How Students Learned About NSU**  
(All Respondents Combined)

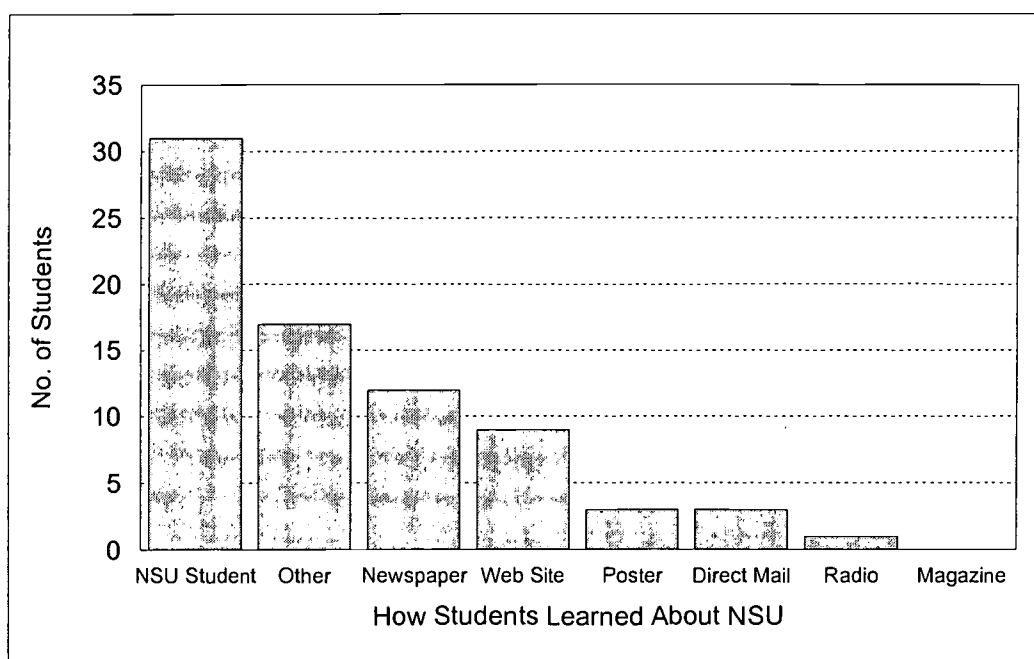


**Table 4**  
**How Students Learned of NSU's Course/Program Offerings**  
**All Respondents Combined**

<b>Advertising Method</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Percent of Total Selections</b>
NSU student	86	47%
Other	58	32%
Newspaper	34	19%
NSU Web site	20	11%
Poster	7	4%
Direct Mail	6	3%
Radio	2	1%
Magazine	2	1%
None selected	3	2%

Similar results for only new students are shown in Figure 2 and Table 5 below.

**Figure 2**  
**Frequency Distribution of How New Students Learned About NSU**



**Table 5**  
**How New Students Learned of NSU's Course/Program Offerings**

<b>Advertising Method</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Percent of Total Selections</b>
NSU student	31	41%
Other	17	22%
Newspaper	12	16%
NSU Web site	9	12%
Poster	3	4%
Direct Mail	3	4%
Radio	1	1%
Magazine	0	0%
None selected	0	0%

The overall results were the same for both all students combined and for only new students. The results show that another NSU student was selected most frequently as the means by which respondents heard about NSU.

The second most frequent choice was "Other". Only approximately half of the students selecting "other" specified the source. All but a few of these cited employers and friends as the way that they learned of NSU. Therefore, on the order of 50 percent of new students and 60 percent of all respondents learned of NSU by word-of-mouth rather than advertising.

Students were also asked whether or not they had attended an information meeting prior to enrolling at NSU. Sixty-nine percent of respondents selected yes, 27 percent no, and four percent did not respond to the item. Results were similar for new students. Sixty-eight percent replied yes, 22 percent no, and 10 percent did not respond to the question.

### **Factors That Impacted Students' Choice to Attend NSU**

The survey asked students to choose from a list of one or more possible factors that may have contributed to their decision to attend NSU rather than a competing institution in the area. The results are shown in Tables 6-15. When the results were combined across all service centers (Table 6), location was the most frequently chosen decision factor, but reputation and facilities were also important factors.

Twenty-seven of the 37 students that selected "other" decision factors, cited convenient meeting times or scheduling of classes. Additional factors noted by students included having received a bachelor's degree from NSU, program length or structure, employer reimbursement, and employer or student recommendations.

**Table 6**  
**Factors Impacting Students' Decision to Attend NSU**  
 (All students combined)

<b>Decision Factor</b>	<b>No. of Students Selecting the Factor</b>	<b>Percent of Total Selections</b>
Location	145	31%
Reputation	121	26%
Facilities Better	93	20%
Less Expensive	75	16%
Other	37	8%

In addition, students were asked to rank the three most important factors. The aggregate results for ranking factors by their level of importance in the decision process (Table 7) were similar to the results for frequency of selection in Table 6. Location was most frequently ranked as the most important factor. Reputation and better facilities both were assigned first and second ranks at higher frequency than factors other than location.

**Table 7**  
**Ranking of Decision Factors at Student Service Centers**  
 (All students combined)

	Number of Students That Ranked the Decision Factor as...		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Reputation	48	46	20
Location	71	47	15
Facilities Better	46	25	23
Less Expensive	13	14	24
Other	24	8	5

When data were examined for individual service centers, the results were similar to those for aggregate data. Reputation and location were most frequently chosen as decision factors, although which one was most frequently chosen varied by service center. It is interesting to note that reputation was most frequently chosen at the Miami Service Center and it was tied with better facilities as the most important factor in the rankings. In contrast, location was the most important factor for students at the Tampa and West Palm Beach Service Centers as indicated by both frequency of choice and ranking of importance. The results for individual service centers are summarized in Table 8-15.

**Table 8**  
**Decision Factors at the Miami Service Center**

<b>Decision Factor</b>	<b>No. of Students Selecting the Factor</b>	<b>Percent of Total Selections</b>
Reputation	59	30%
Location	51	26%
Facilities Better	45	23%
Less Expensive	32	16%
Other	10	5%

**Table 9**  
**Ranking of Decision Factors at the Miami Service Center**

	<b>Number of Students That Ranked the Decision Factor as...</b>		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Reputation	30	18	6
Location	24	18	5
Facilities Better	32	8	3
Less Expensive	11	6	11
Other	4	0	1

**Table 10**  
**Decision Factors at the Tampa Service Center**

<b>Decision Factor</b>	<b>No. of Students Selecting the Factor</b>	<b>Percent of Total Selections</b>
Location	61	34%
Reputation	39	22%
Facilities Better	31	17%
Less Expensive	30	17%
Other	18	10%

**Table 11**  
**Ranking of Decision Factors at the Tampa Service Center**

	Number of Students That Ranked the Decision Factor as...		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Reputation	10	18	9
Location	31	19	5
Facilities Better	6	14	17
Less Expensive	1	5	10
Other	16	5	2

**Table 12**  
**Decision Factors at the Jacksonville Service Center**

<b>Decision Factor</b>	<b>No. of Students Selecting the Factor</b>	<b>Percent of Total Selections</b>
Location	10	37%
Facilities Better	7	26%
Reputation	6	22%
Less Expensive	3	11%
Other	1	4%

**Table 13**  
**Ranking of Decision Factors at the Jacksonville Service Center**

	Number of Students That Ranked the Decision Factor as...		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Reputation	4	1	1
Location	3	6	1
Facilities Better	6	1	0
Less Expensive	0	0	1
Other	1	0	0

**Table 14**  
**Decision Factors at the West Palm Beach Service Center**

<b>Decision Factor</b>	<b>No. of Students Selecting the Factor</b>	<b>Percent of Total Selections</b>
Location	23	34%
Reputation	12	25%
Facilities Better	10	15%
Less Expensive	10	15%
Other	8	12%

**Table 15**  
**Ranking of Decision Factors at the West Palm Beach Service Center**

	Number of Students That Ranked the Decision Factor as...		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Reputation	4	9	4
Location	13	4	4
Facilities Better	2	2	3
Less Expensive	1	3	2
Other	3	3	2

### **Other Colleges and Universities Considered Before Choosing NSU**

Students were asked to list other colleges and universities that they considered before choosing NSU. These data identify institutions that from the student's perspective provide viable alternatives to NSU's programs.

The results are summarized by service center in Tables 16-19. Even though location was an important factor in the decision to attend NSU, students considered some colleges and universities outside of their immediate location.



**Table 16**  
**Other Institutions Considered by Students at the Miami Service Center**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Frequency Listed by Miami Respondents</b>
University of Miami	43
Florida International University	32
Barry University	13
Florida Atlantic University	3
University of Florida	1
None Listed	14

**Table 17**  
**Other Institutions Considered by Students at the Tampa Service Center**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Frequency Listed by Tampa Respondents</b>
University of South Florida	33
University of Phoenix	18
University of Tampa	16
Florida State University	7
University of Miami	5
University of Florida	3
Eckerd College	3
University of Central Florida	2
Florida International University	2
Rollins College	1
Barry University	1
St. Leo University	1
None listed	9

**Table 18**  
**Other Institutions Considered by Students at the Jacksonville Service Center**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Frequency Listed by Jacksonville Respondents</b>
University of North Florida	9
Jacksonville University	6
University of Phoenix	6
University of Florida	2
Florida Atlantic University	1
None listed	2

**Table 19**  
**Other Institutions Considered by Students at the West Palm Beach Service Center**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Frequency Listed by West Palm Beach Respondents</b>
Florida Atlantic University	12
University of Florida	6
University of Miami	5
Palm Beach Atlantic College	4
Florida International University	2
Florida A&M University	2
Florida State University	1
Embry Riddle University	1
None listed	5

## **Discussion**

The survey was administered to 182 students in graduate business classes at Florida Student Service Centers in April and May 2001. The purpose was to gain insight into the factors that led to students' decision to attend NSU rather than some other institution. The survey included questions about how and when students first heard about NSU's programs, specific factors that influenced their decision to enroll, and what other institutions they considered attending.

Advertising campaigns are often launched shortly before registration is to begin for a specific term anticipating that it will stimulate inquiries and lead to enrollments. While this likely is the result, the survey showed that only approximately 20 percent of new students first heard about NSU immediately before enrolling. The remaining new students first heard about NSU one or more years in advance of first enrollment.

Another important finding was that students learned about NSU's course or program offerings most frequently from another NSU student, friends, relatives, or employers rather than from advertising. Therefore, word-of-mouth is an extremely important vehicle for recruitment in Florida.

These two findings raise questions about the function of advertising in recruitment and image building. If prospective students hear about NSU from other students years in advance of enrolling, then the main function of advertising may to serve as an announcement for upcoming registrations and course offerings, rather than as a vehicle to make students aware of NSU's presence and/or reputation.

In order for word-of-mouth to have a positive effect on students' enrollment decision, the person making recommendations or observations should have a positive view of the university. While a recommendation could be based on one or a variety of factors, the institution's reputation in the area likely contributes substantially to the university's image. Reputation was the second most frequently selected decision factor.

Reputation is largely based on the public's perception of the quality of an institution's programs and services. The results suggest that word-of-mouth is the most important vehicle for establishing NSU's reputation. This emphasizes the need for continuing efforts to improve the quality of NSU's educational programs and services to further enhance student satisfaction and the university's reputation among prospective students.

With regard to the effectiveness of advertising media, newspaper advertisements and the NSU Web site were the most frequently cited types of media by which students learned about NSU's programs. Posters, direct mail, and magazines were noted by students at low frequencies. However, all of these forms of media combined were cited at a much lower frequency than word-of-mouth.

The survey also asked students to indicate other colleges and universities they considered. These data provide some insight into which institutions in the vicinity of the service centers compete with NSU. Consistent with location as the most important factor, most students listed other public and independent institutions in the immediate geographic area.

The results for the Miami Service Center were particularly interesting. Miami students chose reputation as the number one decision factor. Moreover, they selected NSU even though many considered the University of Miami and Florida International University as alternatives.

However, the survey results do not indicate the reasons why students ruled out competing institutions. For example, did students enroll at NSU because of its good academic reputation in the area, or because admission requirements at competing institutions were more stringent or scheduling less desirable elsewhere? The majority of students that cited "other" decision factors indicated convenient meeting times or class schedules.

In conclusion, the survey results should be valuable to service center directors and others for planning and assessing modes of informing students of NSU's course and program offerings, and for identifying local competitors. The results may also guide future more detailed assessments of the reasons students enroll at NSU rather than elsewhere.



April 2001

NSU is interested in learning about the factors that led to your enrollment. Please take a moment to answer the questions below. The few minutes you spend will provide NSU with valuable information for planning and improving services for potential students.

**Please rank up to three of the following factors based on their impact upon your decision to enroll at NSU. ( A value of a "1" would be the most important factor)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ NSU's academic reputation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Location of local facilities were convenient
- \_\_\_\_\_ Less expensive than other institutions considered
- \_\_\_\_\_ Local NSU facilities / services better than those of other institutions considered
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

**What other colleges / universities did you consider before choosing NSU?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**When did you first hear about NSU? (Select one from each column)**

- |                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Fall   | <input type="radio"/> 2001            |
| <input type="radio"/> Winter | <input type="radio"/> 2000            |
| <input type="radio"/> Spring | <input type="radio"/> 1999            |
| <input type="radio"/> Summer | <input type="radio"/> 1998 or earlier |

**When did you first enroll at NSU? (Select one from each column)**

- |                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Fall   | <input type="radio"/> 2001            |
| <input type="radio"/> Winter | <input type="radio"/> 2000            |
| <input type="radio"/> Spring | <input type="radio"/> 1999            |
| <input type="radio"/> Summer | <input type="radio"/> 1998 or earlier |

**Did you attend an information meeting prior to enrolling at NSU?**

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

**How did you learn of NSU's course / program offerings? Select all that apply.**

- |                                    |                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Newspaper ad | <input type="radio"/> Direct mail     |
| <input type="radio"/> Radio ad     | <input type="radio"/> Poster          |
| <input type="radio"/> NSU website  | <input type="radio"/> NSU student     |
| <input type="radio"/> Magazine     | <input type="radio"/> Other (explain) |

**In what program are you currently enrolled? (Select one from each column)**

- |                                  |                                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's | <input type="radio"/> Business  |
| <input type="radio"/> Master's   | <input type="radio"/> Education |
| <input type="radio"/> Doctorate  | <input type="radio"/> Other     |

**What is your major?** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for completing this survey.

○ ● ○ ○ ○



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